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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

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Summary record of the 862nd meeting (Chamber B)
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Friday, 31 October 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Gaspard (Vice-Chairperson)

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08-58723 (E)

In the absence of the Chairperson, Ms. Gaspard (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined second, third, fourth and fifth periodic reports of Madagascar (CEDAW/C/MDG/5; CEDAW/C/MDG/Q/5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Madagascar took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that her delegation welcomed the opportunity to renew its dialogue with the Committee after a long delay, which had been due to a number of technical, financial and other reasons. She reiterated her Government's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention. The fifth periodic report had been prepared by an inter-ministerial "Drafting Committee for initial and periodic reports concerning human rights", with the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

3. The political will to give priority to the advancement of women was embodied in the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), which encompassed Madagascar's objectives for 2008-2012 towards the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), in particular Goal 3 on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Government had made efforts to eliminate laws that discriminated against women. Since 1989, when it had ratified the Convention, Madagascar had acceded to many major international human rights instruments of direct relevance to the status and protection of women, and in September 2008, the President had signed the South African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development.

4. At the national level, the Constitution of 1992 and its revision of May 2007 established the primacy of international treaties over domestic provisions and maintained protection of women's fundamental rights. In follow-up to the recommendations issued by the Committee in 1994, the Government had carried out a number of legislative reforms, including raising the legal age of marriage to 18 for both men and women; establishing identical sentences for men and women convicted of adultery; and the equal division of marital assets on dissolution of marriage. Stricter sentences were also imposed under the laws governing violence against women, including procurement, sexual harassment, assault and domestic violence.

5. In order to inform women of their rights, the Ministry of Justice had produced an educational film on violence against women, and had established legal clinics, providing the option of mediation and reconciliation. The clinics were an effective response to the needs of underprivileged women, because they provided a forum for the resolution of disputes without necessarily going to court. To date, the majority of cases handled in the clinics pertained to violations of women's rights committed within the context of marriage. The Ministry of Health, Family Planning and Social Protection operated crisis centres in six regions, and provided psychological and moral support, as well as legal advice. A law passed in 2008 made trafficking in persons a separate offence with severe penalties. Reception centres had been established to provide assistance to victims of child labour and trafficking, with the objective of facilitating their reintegration into schools or vocational centres.

6. The Convention could be cited directly in the courts. In order to achieve its full implementation by judges, awareness-raising activities and training had been organized, at the regional and local levels, for public officials and traditional leaders, stakeholders responsible for the enforcement of laws, and civil society. Regular television and radio broadcasts informed the public about international human rights instruments. In addition, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was providing support for a multi-year programme, 2008-2011 to ensure that citizens were aware of their rights under international treaties and could assert those rights in national courts and to strengthen institutional capacity for the implementation of those instruments. Human rights was included in the training offered to members of the judiciary, law enforcement officers and officials of the penitentiary system.

7. The strategies and programmes established by the Government of Madagascar for the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women were based on international commitments made during the major United Nations conferences held since 1994. The national policy for the promotion of women had been operationalized through the National Action Plan on

Gender and Development (PANAGED) for the period 2004-2008. Among its features was the establishment of a gender observatory (SIMIRALENTA) for the compilation of a sex-disaggregated database and the mainstreaming of gender into school curriculums.

8. Turning to health and social protection, she said that the improvement of maternal health figured among the main objectives of the Madagascar Action Plan. Areas of priority included mother and child health care, sensitization campaigns on reproductive health and family planning, and the delivery of universal maternal and neo-natal care. According to the demographic and health surveys, those activities had reduced maternal and child mortality from 488 per 100,000 live births to 469 between 1997 and 2004 while the under-five mortality rate fell from 159 to 94 per 1,000 within the same period.

9. In the fight against HIV/AIDS, the Government had set the goals of stabilizing the prevalence rate at below 1 per cent and achieving universal geographic coverage of treatment centres by 2011. As a result, treatment facilities had mushroomed throughout the country, rising from 200 in 2005 to 670 in 2008. Madagascar was among the first countries of Africa to adopt a law on combating HIV/AIDS and protecting the rights of persons living with the virus, to end discrimination and stigmatization.

10. In order to boost women's economic participation, the Government had developed a national micro-finance strategy for 2008-2010, with 3 million dollars in funding, to allow women access to the means of production necessary for their participation in development. Moreover, measures for business development and land distribution had been implemented in the outlying regions. Employment conditions for women in the public sector had been improved by new maternity leave benefits and the introduction of flexible working arrangements. Over 3,000 women from 22 regions had been trained in leadership skills, and there had been a significant increase in the number of women who had been appointed as ministers, members of the Supreme Court and to other influential posts in the judiciary and the executive branch and high-ranking positions in the public service.

11. Current indicators on the education of girls showed clear improvements in their school enrolment; rate of completion of primary, secondary and tertiary education; ratio of male and female teachers and literacy rates in the over-15 population. Within the context of Madagascar's commitment to Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals, a reform of the educational system had been launched in 2008 in order to expand opportunities for schoolchildren living in rural areas and restructure early childhood education. The retention of children, especially girls, in school helped to reduce the risk of early marriage.

12. Turning to gender stereotypes and customs which were incompatible with the basic provisions of the Convention, she said that in 2007, the Ministry of Justice, with the support of UNDP, had studied the origins, content and consequences of traditions that impeded its full implementation. Such customs included the denial of the right of women to choose their spouses and the practice of forcing women to abandon their newborn twins. Sectoral and community discussions had been held among traditional chiefs, public figures, religious leaders, civil society and State actors working in decentralized entities, in search of an appropriate strategy to end such practices.

13. The achievement of Goal 3, empowerment of women, was within reach in Madagascar. Providing equal access to education for girls and boys and the promotion of the role of women in decision-making would be major challenges in the years ahead.

Articles 1 to 6

14. **Ms. Patten** asked whether the inter-ministerial committee for the drafting of reports concerning human rights was a standing committee. The Government of Madagascar must adhere more strictly to the reporting guidelines in the preparation of future periodic reports, both in terms of content and timeliness of their delivery. She was pleased to learn that NGOs had been involved in the preparation of the periodic report, and asked whether the report had been discussed with the national parliament and whether the Government intended to present the concluding comments to Parliament after the current exercise.

15. She commended the Government of Madagascar on the extensive legal reform it had undertaken, and on the adoption of a considerable body of domestic legislation and international instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights. She asked about progress made so far in follow-up to Madagascar's accession to the Optional Protocol.

16. Noting that the definition of discrimination against women under the Constitution did not encompass direct and indirect discrimination in line with article 1 of the Convention, she was curious to know how broadly the judges of Madagascar interpreted the concept of discrimination against women. The reason that the Convention was rarely invoked before the courts could be that the judiciary and legal practitioners were not conversant with its provisions, a problem that could be remedied through training programmes to inform the judiciary on gender issues, and to impart an understanding of the broad scope of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations.

17. **Ms. Dairiam** asked whether women could file petitions based on article 1 of the Convention, in the absence of a definition of discrimination under that article. She was curious to know whether the Convention had primacy over domestic law in that context. The prohibition of discrimination under the Constitution was not entirely clear, and she wished to know whether the laws had been comprehensively analysed in order to identify discriminatory provisions which needed to be amended, in order to render the Convention directly applicable, and if not, when the Government planned to do so.

18. She asked for examples of the types of offences handled by the Supreme Court. Further information about the reform of the customary system of justice, as recommended by the Human Rights Committee in 2007 would be useful. She wondered how much emphasis was placed on gender issues in the training of legal personnel.

19. She asked whether the law that was anticipated to broaden the mandate of the National Human Rights Council had been published, whether the members of the Council had been appointed, and whether the institutional capacity of Madagascar was sufficiently developed to address violations of the rights protected under the Convention.

20. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether the poverty reduction strategy was still in effect, and whether it was funded by the national budget or donors. She was interested in knowing whether the strategy was based on a gender perspective, or gave women preferential treatment through the adoption of temporary special measures.

21. She welcomed the establishment of the gender observatory, whose work would boost Madagascar's capacity in data collection, and asked for further details on the specific areas in which sex-disaggregated data had been compiled and whether statistics would eventually be further disaggregated according to age.

22. Experience had shown that there were often interesting projects that were not sustainable in the long run, and therefore the Committee needed sufficient information to better evaluate the efforts made by the Government. She consequently asked for specific information on the income-generation activities and for statistics on the sectors involved. She was interested in knowing the components of the *Entreprendre* programme, and in particular, whether it included awareness-raising or skills training.

23. She asked which family members received titles under the land distribution scheme, whether single women were also slated to receive land, and for further details on the Government's micro-finance enterprises.

24. **Ms. Neubauer** requested clarification on the institutional framework for the development, implementation and assessment of the Government's policy on gender equality. She also enquired about the National Committee for the Advancement of Women and the Protection of Children including its functions, responsibilities and composition, its role in the preparation of the periodic report, and to whom it was accountable. She wished to know whether the authority, visibility, political recognition and funding of the National Committee and other public entities had increased during the reporting period.

25. The roles of the various units, departments, and structures within Government sectors needed to be clarified, particularly with respect to the distinction between the General Directorate on the promotion of gender, under the Ministry of Health, Family Planning and Social Protection and the Directorate for women and children's affairs in the Ministry of Population. She was curious to know how they coordinated their activities with those led by the local districts in fields related to the advancement of women. Furthermore, she asked whether there was a mechanism to coordinate and monitor the implementation of national policy.

26. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked about the composition of the National Human Rights Council. She also urged the

Government to consult general recommendation No. 25 on the application of temporary special measures, the purpose of which extended beyond the realm of the civil service. While acknowledging the progress achieved in the implementation of the Convention, there remained much room for progress in the political sphere.

27. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar) said that the inter-ministerial committee for drafting periodic reports, established to reduce the backlog in the presentation of periodic reports to United Nations treaty bodies, was still functioning. The Government had not understood that it was a requirement for periodic reports to be discussed in Parliament, but was also not averse to the practice, especially if it might improve results and strengthen the protection of human rights.

28. With regard to the ratification of the Optional Protocol, there was work to be done in ensuring that domestic remedies were effectively exercised, and that judicial responses were in keeping with the Convention. The development of an appropriate mechanism for domestic recourse would speed up the ratification of the Optional Protocol.

29. The Convention was directly applicable when its provisions were clear, precise and did not require a revision of national legislation. It was not possible to apply the Convention in the context of criminal law, because domestic laws needed to provide the specifications necessary for charges and sentencing.

30. Concerning the interpretation and application of the concept of discrimination in domestic legislation and jurisdiction, the Convention had primacy over domestic law and could be invoked by domestic courts from the moment its provisions were published. The definition of discrimination under the Convention could not be applied since its incorporation was governed by the Constitution.

31. The National Human Rights Council had been established according to the guidelines contained in the Paris Principles, and was therefore pluralistic in its makeup, encompassing civil society, associations, trade unions, academia, Parliament and the Executive Branch. However, there was no specific gender quota.

32. The mandate of the inter-ministerial drafting committee, which was funded by the European Union and Government of Madagascar, did not extend beyond the preparation of periodic reports and monitoring of the implementation of the recommendations issued by the treaty bodies.

33. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that course modules on international conventions, including the present Convention, were offered to judges, the military and the police, at the start of their careers, and on an ongoing basis.

34. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar), responding to the query on customary justice, said that there were local mechanisms for handling minor offences, but certain disputes were supervised by a court of first instance. For the most part, local community disputes did not require the involvement of regular courts.

35. **Ms. Fida Cyrille** (Madagascar) said that apart from the various initial and periodic reports submitted by the inter-ministerial drafting committee to United Nations treaty bodies, it also prepared reports for other entities, such as the report on the African Charter for Human Rights, for submission to the African Human Rights Commission.

36. **Ms. Rahantanirina** (Madagascar) said that the Government's poverty reduction strategy provided support to the extremely poor and vulnerable sectors, which were sizeable, given that the poverty rate exceeded 60 per cent of the population. Much effort had been invested in social protection and production aimed at the general improvement of economic and living standards. Rural women, children, the disabled and older persons were the main beneficiaries of the strategy.

37. The National Action Plan on Gender and Development (PANAGED) established five components for the improvement of economic effectiveness. Rural women and those working in the informal sector were granted priority through improved access to the means of production, land and microcredit loans. Efforts were also made to improve the water supply, both as a health and sanitation concern, and as a means of alleviating the daily domestic burdens of women. Furthermore, the Action Plan had launched initiatives to encourage young women to return to school, improve social conditions, and introduce legislation to prevent violence.

38. The linkage between health and population issues had led the Government to integrate the themes of maternal and child health under the Ministry of Health,

Family Planning and Social Protection. The activities of the General Directorate for gender promotion and advancement were decentralized to the regions, and its representatives were responsible for coordinating and harmonizing activities on gender promotion.

39. **Ms. Safara Ralimanana** (Madagascar) said that rural women had been encouraged to get involved in development, and after a period of training, received land grants and microcredit. The focus was mainly on the informal sector, farming, livestock breeding and small craft industries, and basic supplies such as seeds, equipment and other material support were allocated according to the needs of the beneficiaries.

40. With regard to employment, she said that the Labour Code did not make any distinction according to gender. The National Labour Council ensured that the tripartite dialogue between the State, unions representing workers and employers was conducted in a non-discriminatory manner.

41. Numerous studies in the social, cultural and economic spheres had focused on issues of relevance to women, including demographics, access to health services and the use of contraceptives. Useful data on women's health and infant mortality rates had been gleaned through a recent household survey.

42. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar) said that the Government had not perceived a pressing need to adopt temporary special measures or introduce quotas for women in the public sector, since women obtained better results than men in the civil service examinations.

43. **Ms. Pimentel** requested more information on the customs and practices that denied women the full enjoyment of their rights, and asked what steps had been anticipated in order to overcome those cultural obstacles. Did those traditional practices include female genital mutilation?

44. She asked whether there were plans for a specific law to protect women against domestic violence, and whether police officers were trained to recognize and deal effectively with such cases. She wondered what obstacles prevented women from pressing charges against their aggressors, and whether marital rape was punishable under Act No. 2000-021, amending and supplementing certain provisions of the Malagasy Criminal Code. She commended the adoption of Act No. 96-009, which repealed discriminatory provisions of criminal law and introduced equal penalties for women and men found guilty of adultery, and asked about its impact.

45. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she was impressed by Madagascar's progress in the 14 years since it has last appeared before the Committee. She asked for more details on the impact of Act No. 2000-021 on violence against women, particularly with respect to penalties for rape, indecent assault, kidnapping and murder. She wished to know whether the Act contained a comprehensive definition of violence against women, and whether, under the Act, the State was obliged to provide judicial remedies and protection to the victims.

46. According to information provided by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, including its causes and consequences, women in Malagasy prisons had been subjected to torture and rape and were deprived of adequate nutrition. She wondered whether investigations had been launched into such allegations.

47. **Ms. Gabr** stressed the importance of eliminating entrenched stereotypes and mindsets. The application of the Convention in Madagascar seemed to have helped to mitigate the negative impact of stereotypes, so she was particularly interested in knowing whether the bodies established to deal with women's rights had been effective. She also asked whether there was a comprehensive plan to combat existing stereotypes, or whether legal measures had been adopted to reinforce other approaches taken to inform women of their rights. In that connection, she also reiterated the invaluable role of teachers and the media in sensitizing the public, especially through radio broadcasts, which had proved effective in countries with high levels of illiteracy.

48. **Ms. Begum** noted that Madagascar had introduced a number of important laws and programmes to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation, but wished to follow up on reports that schoolchildren were involved in prostitution, often at the behest of their parents, for financial reasons. She asked whether the microcredit arrangements and poverty eradication programmes had been assessed, and if priority was given to members of vulnerable groups, such as prostitutes. She also asked whether prostitutes had access to health services, HIV/AIDS programmes, and protection against violence on the same footing as other women. She enquired about life-skills training and work-study programmes to

broaden the job options for young persons. She would like to know if efforts to raise awareness on sex tourism among the target audiences had been effective.

49. Turning to the topic of law enforcement, she noted that the police force was understaffed, and asked about plans for the recruitment of additional police officers. She asked what measures had been taken to ensure that persons who were responsible for trafficking or exploiting women and children for sexual purposes were convicted and sentenced. It would be useful to know more about any plans of action or programmes designed to combat sex tourism at the national level.

50. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that Act No. 2000-021 of 30 November 2000, incorporated into the Malagasy Criminal Code, imposed severe penalties for sexual harassment, which constituted gender-based violence. Article 312 of the Act imposed specific sanctions on all forms of domestic violence, such as assault, battery, and violence against pregnant women. Regrettably, the statistics available to the Ministry of Justice were not sufficient for officials to make a proper assessment of crimes against women, or to analyse the evolution of the situation since the adoption of the Act. However, the approach to data-collection within the Ministry of Justice was currently under review.

51. The legal clinics created by the Ministry of Justice provided free legal aid and counselling in centres located throughout the country, thereby ensuring wide access to justice by clients, the majority of whom were women.

52. She had no information on the allegation of ill-treatment in prisons, but acts of misconduct by agents of the prison system were subject to strong disciplinary action. Much focus had been placed on improving prison conditions, especially with respect to amenities for female inmates. A number of improvements had already been made throughout the entire prison system, and particular care had been taken to provide women with private and comfortable living areas. She reiterated Madagascar's commitment to its obligations under the Convention against Torture. There had been no allegations of torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment or ill-treatment of female inmates in the prisons.

53. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar) acknowledged that customs such as forced marriage constituted a violation of a woman's right of choice, and that such marriages posed a risk to the health of young girls. The abandonment of twins was another practice that deprived women of their rights as mothers, and was therefore not compatible with the provisions of the Convention.

54. **Ms. Safara Ralimanana** (Madagascar) said that in the south-east region of Madagascar, women in common-law relationships were denied the right to inherit property. The Government had launched an intense public awareness campaign, including advocacy and consultations with local leaders to dismantle discriminatory practices that jeopardized the empowerment of women and prevented them from taking their place alongside men as equal partners in development.

55. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar) said that domestic violence, trafficking, sex tourism and other forms of violence against women fell within the ambit of a national programme supported by United Nations Children's Fund and the United States Agency for International Development. The programme aimed at familiarizing the implementers with new legislative provisions, but it also tried to reach the public through radio, film and television broadcasts, showing the effects of violence on women, the options available for their protection and sources from which they could seek redress. High-profile media personalities and NGOs were involved in efforts to reassure the population that aggressors would no longer be allowed to harm women with impunity.

56. **Ms. Rahantanirina** (Madagascar) said that the Government's policy on social protection was executed in close cooperation with the private sector, through a multi-year plan for risk management and social protection, which included strategies for developing income-generating activities and granting microcredit. The *Entreprendre* programme helped to channel funds by providing food, disaster relief and other support to local populations, and NGOs were actively developing income-generating agricultural ventures.

57. **Ms. Rabenoro** (Madagascar) said that a clear link between poverty, school dropout and prostitution among schoolgirls had been established. Many parents had inadequate resources for maintaining and educating their children, and girls had to contribute their share of the expenses of the household. In order to mitigate the consequences to those girls, the

Government had started to encourage schools to readmit pregnant girls to prevent them from giving up their education. One aim of the National Action Plan for Gender and Development was to provide vital information on reproductive health and a wide range of support to young girls.

58. In addition to the other risks incurred by young girls, she mentioned a custom that exacerbated their vulnerability: at the age of puberty, girls were required to move away from the family home into separate accommodation in the vicinity of the main house, but outside the direct supervision of their parents.

59. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that Act No. 2007-038 of 14 January 2008, modifying and complementing certain provisions of the Penal Code concerning trafficking in persons and sex tourism, severely sanctioned sexual exploitation and sex tourism, tightened loopholes on impunity, and introduced penalties against parents who exploited their children for the purpose of prostitution.

60. **Ms. Fida Cyrille** (Madagascar) reiterated that in 2008 Parliament had ratified the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.

61. Several measures against sex tourism involving children were launched under the framework of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women in 2005, in partnership with donors and civil society. The campaign involved tourism professionals at all levels and sex workers themselves, and focused on training, rehabilitation and health education. It also stressed the production and dissemination of information in the form of posters, brochures and advertisements in order to ensure that the local population and visitors to the island were adequately sensitized on the issue.

62. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that a comprehensive training programme was conducted to ensure that the magistrates, police officers, correctional personnel and all others concerned were fully aware of the observance and application of the Convention, including sex tourism, domestic violence and its consequences on women and children.

63. **Ms. Pimentel** asked whether explicit reference was made to marital rape under Act No. 2000-021 of 28 November 2000.

64. **Ms. Neubauer** requested information on the current institutional structure for the advancement of women and promotion of gender equality. She wished to know whether the National Committee for the Advancement of Women and the Protection of Children was still in operation. If so, an explanation of its membership, mandate and powers would be helpful. She was also interested in the mechanism for coordination of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women.

65. **Ms. Schöpp-Schilling** asked whether a minimum of 50 per cent of the budget for the poverty reduction strategy, the National Action Plan on Gender and Development and the national micro-finance strategy was targeted at women, in line with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. The adoption of temporary special measures was of particular value to poverty alleviation efforts since poverty tended to have a more serious impact on women than men.

66. Temporary special measures were also called for in the public sphere, because, even though women were more successful than men in the examinations for entry into the civil service, it did not necessarily mean that they occupied decision-making positions. She also noted that mandatory quotas should be established for members of the National Human Rights Council.

67. While there was no specific requirement under the Convention for periodic reports to be presented to Parliament, the Committee nonetheless hoped that national parliaments would be aware of their content and participate in follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations.

68. **Ms. Gabr** asked whether the Government of Madagascar intended to create shelters for women who were victims of domestic violence.

69. **Ms. Begum** asked what plans were envisaged to strengthen the fight against trafficking. With reference to the practice of forcing girls to live in separate dwellings at puberty, she asked for the age-range of those girls, and whether pubescent boys were also separated from their families according to custom.

70. **Ms. Patten** asked for the precise number of men and women serving on the National Human Rights Council. She also asked whether there was an established legal aid mechanism through which women could seek legal recourse.

71. **Mr. Rakotoniaina** (Madagascar) said that marital rape was not considered a separate offence under existing legislation. Although it was considered a private matter and was not discussed openly, the gravity of such acts had led the Ministry of Justice to produce a film that informed women of their rights as victims of marital rape, and explained the legal channels through which they could seek protection and remedy.

72. **Ms. Rahantaoirina** (Madagascar) said that the office responsible for gender advancement within the General Directorate for Social Protection (Ministry of Health) coordinated all activities relating to the status of women. The General Directorate, operating under its own budget, was represented in all 22 regions. The role of its central body was to set policy on the promotion of gender issues and to coordinate the operation of projects nationwide, focusing on the improvement of the economic and social status of women. An intersectoral committee had engaged the relevant stakeholders from civil society, the Parliament and Senate in the preparation of the periodic report and other aspects of monitoring the implementation of the Convention.

73. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that the National Human Rights Council had recently been established, and was comprised of representatives of the executive and legislative branches of Government, representatives of a wide range of entities, including the Prime Minister's Office, the legal profession, academia, civil society, journalism, human rights and trade union organizations. Although the law establishing the Council did not establish specific requirements for eligibility, it was important to encourage a strong representation of women.

74. During the preparation of the periodic report, the Government had taken the initiative to submit the text to Parliament for comment. The Committee's concluding observations would be transmitted to Parliament and civil society, in order to ensure that all stakeholders were included in follow-up, and that all important elements would be taken fully into account in future legislation.

75. **Ms. Safara Ralimanana** (Madagascar) said that young girls who were placed at risk when they were housed separately from the rest of the family at puberty were eligible for medical, social and economic support. Twelve centres had been established by the Ministry of Health and Family Planning to offer those girls an opportunity to continue their education through the acquisition of vocational skills, and to receive counselling and reproductive health care.

76. Women, particularly female heads of households, were the main beneficiaries of microcredit arrangements. The gender perspective was also an important component in the management of water supply programmes since it was the women in rural communities who performed the time-consuming domestic tasks and had the greatest influence in decisions that concerned the welfare of their families and communities. Even though entire families derived the benefits of improvements to infrastructure, it was important to ensure that women obtained the appropriate resources for production and development.

77. **Ms. Rahantaoirina** (Madagascar) said that parliamentary discussions had been held on the establishment of gender-sensitive budgets in various ministries. A meeting had been planned to review the 2009 financial programme within the Senate and National Assembly. Special attention would be paid to projects for the advancement of women, and a proportion of the budget would be allocated to credit mechanisms.

78. **Ms. Ramanandraibe** (Madagascar) said that the Ministry of Justice planned to update the mechanisms for legal aid and the operation of legal clinics. All instruments relating to legal aid were under review to better serve the population.

Articles 7 to 9

79. **Ms. Neubauer** welcomed the progress achieved in enhancing the participation of women in political and public life, particularly in the Government and judiciary. While outlining the efforts to increase Madagascar's leadership capacity, the periodic report also showed that customary and traditional practices perpetuated discriminatory behaviour patterns and impeded progress. She therefore asked what further steps were being considered in order to persuade political parties to encourage women to join their ranks, or to include them as candidates on electoral lists.

80. Television and radio programming was an effective tool in disseminating information on human and political rights and gender equality, but she wondered about the scope of such communication

strategies when 80 per cent of households lived in rural areas, without access to radio and television sets. She therefore asked what methods had been used to reach women in rural areas.

81. It was clear that the proportion of women elected to Parliament, the Senate, and local government was rather low, and there was an urgent need to create the legal, political, administrative, and social framework to ensure that women participated fully in public and political life.

82. **Ms. Belmihoub-Zerdani** said that Madagascar had faced understandable difficulties in overcoming the legacy of its colonial past, implementing structural adjustment programmes, and in establishing an appropriate institutional framework for the advancement of women. Leadership training for women was a commendable initiative that would certainly encourage them to participate more fully in public life. In order to increase the representation of women in Parliament, the Government should consider using subsidies to political parties that promoted the participation of women as an incentive.

83. The inability of a woman to transfer her own nationality to her child could be regarded as one of the worse forms of discrimination; she therefore looked forward to the resolution of that long-standing issue, in line with article 9, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

84. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that she was interested in learning more about women in decision-making positions at the local level, and requested further information on the presence of women in territorial assemblies and on the special committees responsible for women's affairs within municipal councils. There was tremendous potential to address inequality and change traditional stereotypes at the local level, especially in rural communities. More attention should be paid to the career development of women in the civil service, which also had implications for their pension entitlements. There were some gaps in the information relating to female career diplomats, and she asked for further details in that regard.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.